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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 000508

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SUBJECT: LOWEST RAINFALL LEVELS SINCE 1995 CAUSE JORDAN TO  
PREPARE FOR SUMMER DROUGHT

REF: A. 08 AMMAN 3011

[1](#)B. 08 AMMAN 1639

[1](#)C. 08 AMMAN 409

[1](#)D. 08 AMMAN 228

[1](#)E. 07 ROME 2518

[1](#)F. 07 AMMAN 668

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Government of Jordan (GOJ) is preparing for a summer water crisis due to the lowest rainfall levels since 1995. As the fourth driest country in the world, Jordan has long had its share of water troubles (reftels). Even during years of average to good rain, Jordan's total water supply of 850 million cubic meters (MCM) cannot meet estimated annual demand of over 1,520 MCM. Last winter, dam storage was at 45% of total dam capacity, which was considered inadequate. This winter, dam storage as of February 22 (two-thirds of the way through the rainy season) is even lower at 79 MCM or 36.8% of total dam capacity. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) has indicated that dam storage levels of about 60-65% would allow Jordan to "relax" a bit. Without additional rain over the next few months, the water situation could become extremely difficult this summer.

Likely policy options range from cutting off water supplies for the summer vegetable crops by May 2009 to reducing water availability in Amman by 10% during the summer 2009. Jordan may also ask Israel for additional water resources in 2009, as it did in 2008. Water tariffs, which include subsidies for agricultural use, are unlikely to increase in the current economic and political climate. The significant USG assistance in the water sector has, and will continue to be, critical for Jordan's economic and sustainable development. End Summary.

Winter 2008-9: Lowest Rainfall since 1995  
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[1](#)2. (U) Jordan's long-term average rainfall is 228 mm (9 inches), which equates to approximately 780 MCM after evaporation. The last good rainy season in Jordan occurred in 2004-5 with 336 mm (13.2 inches), which led to dam storage reaching about 80% of capacity totaling 217 MCM. NOTE: GOJ statistics do not include the 110 MCM Unity Dam on the Yarmouk river along the Jordan-Syria border, which has never exceeded its 10 MCM dead-storage capacity (ref F). END NOTE.

Since then, Jordan has seen less rainfall but greater water demand due to rapid economic growth averaging 6% and an

expanding population of nearly six million. The average Jordanian consumes 170 cubic meters of water per year, compared to 9,000 cubic meters available to the average U.S. citizen.

13. (U) Last year during the 2007-8 winter, Jordan only received 57% of its long-term annual average rainfall, and dam storage levels were considered to be bad at about 45% of total capacity. This winter, however, has proven to be even worse. Jordan's Meteorological Department has recorded the lowest levels of rainfall since 1995. As of February 22 (roughly two-thirds of the way through the November-April rainy season), Jordan had reached only 73 mm or 32% of its annual average rainfall. The GOJ recorded current dam storage at about 79.4 MCM or 36.8% of total dam capacity. If the figures were to include the Unity Dam, current dam storage statistics would look even worse at 24% of total capacity. Such levels barely meet the strategic reserve needed to provide farmers with water during drought-like conditions. According to the MWI, dam storage levels of 60-65% would allow them to "relax" a bit. Estimates of total annual demand exceed 1,520 MCM, so without additional rain over the next few months, the GOJ has indicated that the situation this summer could be extremely difficult.

#### GOJ Resisting the Declaration of a Drought

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14. (C) MWI Secretary General Maysoun Al-Zoubi and Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) Secretary General Mousa Jamani conveyed to ESTH Officer serious concern about an impending summer water crisis. They thought it unlikely, however, that the GOJ would declare a summer drought given the possibility of triggering compensation claims by farmers. NOTE: Landowners in the Jordan Valley often have water rights attached to their crops. The JVA is obligated to deliver water to crops once in the ground. If water resources are reduced during an official drought, the JVA has to compensate farmers who do not receive sufficient water for all planted crops. END NOTE. Given that the King has also pronounced 2009 as the "Year of Agriculture," declaring a drought might not be a politically palatable option.

#### Policy Options: Only Trees and Humans Get Water

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15. (SBU) The GOJ is examining various policy options to deal with the water crisis. Jamani noted that "only trees and humans" will get water in Jordan after the water supply for summer vegetable crops is cut off on April 30. Even though municipal needs get priority, the water supply in Amman is also expected to be reduced this summer by 10% from the prior year (most parts of Amman currently get roof-top water tanks filled only one to two days per week). MWI may also buy water from private well owners to cover municipal water requirements.

#### Water Tariffs Unlikely to Increase

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16. (C) The GOJ currently subsidizes the agricultural sector which consumes 65% of Jordan's water resources while contributing less than 3% of GDP. The JVA never executed a plan to raise its agricultural water tariff structure in 2008 (ref C), and Jamani noted "now is not a suitable time to raise tariffs given that we are likely to cut their water supply." Al-Zoubi echoed the political sentiment stating that "Parliament would give us a headache if we were to raise water tariffs." Al-Zoubi asserted that increasing agricultural water tariffs for poor farmers without giving them training in improving their water efficiency would be of little value. She noted a JVA initiative to train Jordan Valley farmers in water efficiency, drip irrigation, demand management, marketing, and planting of less water intensive cash-crops.

#### Jordan May Ask Israel for Water Help Again

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¶17. (C) Jamani noted that Jordan will probably ask Israel for additional water resources this summer, although the outcome could depend on Israeli elections and Israel,s own water shortages. NOTE: Under the 1994 Peace Treaty, Jordan stores 20 MCM of excess water in Lake Tiberius every winter, and Israel returns this water to Jordan ever summer less evaporation losses. Over the last few years, Jordan has not been able to fill its winter storage capacity but has nonetheless kept receiving summer allocations from Israel. In 2008, Jordan received a water loan of 11 MCM (ref B). END NOTE. With USG support, MWI is continuing its cooperation with Israel and the Palestinians on technical water issues through the EXACT Water Data Banks project (ref E). Itai Badov, Political Officer at the Israeli Embassy in Amman, told ESTH Officer, however, that recent discussions with Jordan regarding Israel supplying desalinated water to Jordan have paused due to the Gaza crisis. Badov added that Israel is suffering its own "one in a hundred years" drought.

Longer Term Solutions: Some Delayed, Others Continue  
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¶18. (SBU) Two large infrastructure projects to increase Jordan,s water supply have been plagued by delays. Launched in July 2008, the Disi project to bring 100 MCM of water annually from the southern Jordan aquifer to Amman has suffered several funding delays and is not expected to start before April 2009, with no benefits being seen before 2012. Similarly, the Red Sea-Dead Sea Canal feasibility study (RDS) led by the World Bank (ref A) has been delayed to 2010 due to initial funding gaps, insufficient baseline data, and a delay in progress meetings due to the Gaza crisis. With the help of Montgomery Watson Harza, Jordan is still planning a quick implementation start after the RDS is completed with a projected operational date of 2017 (ref A).

¶19. (SBU) The Royal Water Committee, chaired by Prince Feisal, has prepared and shared with stakeholders a draft water strategy that is expected to be finalized by April. USAID (the biggest donor in Jordan,s water sector with over \$600 million invested over the last 10 years) and several other donors continue to play a key role in assisting MWI in ongoing water reform initiatives (ref C). The Millennium Challenge Corporation is also moving forward with preparations to sign the Compact in 2009 and focus on four projects in the water sector in the Zarqa area. These long-term efforts will remain critical for balancing water demand and supply in Jordan.

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